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C O N F I D E N T I A L TUNIS 000924

SIPDIS

STATE FOR NEA/ARP AND NEA/MAG (NARDI AND HARRIS)

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [EINV](#) [QA](#) [TS](#)

SUBJECT: TUNISIA TO RE-OPEN EMBASSY IN QATAR

REF: A. TUNIS 194

[1](#)B. 06 TUNIS 2802

[1](#)C. 06 TUNIS 2639

Classified By: Ambassador Robert F. Godec for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

[1](#)1. (C) Tunisia has announced that it will re-open its embassy in Qatar, which it closed in October 2006 to protest al-Jazeera's unfavorable coverage of domestic politics in Tunisia. Foreign Minister Abdallah had previewed this decision for NEA A/S Welch during the latter's late February visit to Tunisia (Ref A), indicating that, while the GOT remained incensed at al-Jazeera's inflammatory style, it no longer made sense to have no representation in Doha. In the credentialing ceremony at Carthage palace, President Ben Ali emphasized the importance he attaches to relations with Qatar. He charged the newly appointed ambassador with working to consolidate and diversity ties in the pursuit of common interests.

[1](#)2. (C) Tunisia's new Ambassador to Qatar will be Mahmoud Karoui. Karoui has been a member of the Chamber of Deputies since 1999, representing the ruling Democratic Constitutional Rally (RCD) party. About 60 years old, he hails from Nabeul, on Tunisia's northeastern coast. He holds a Ph.D. in pharmaceutical industry and was one of the founders of the Tunisian Faculty of Pharmacy in 1975. This is his first diplomatic posting.

[1](#)3. (C) Comment: The GOT's 2006 decision to recall its ambassador and close its Embassy appears to have been made without much consideration for the negative consequences. Abdallah acknowledged the mistake in February; we are only surprised that it took the GOT this long to reverse course. The Emir of Qatar has made more than one visit to Tunisia in the interim, ostensibly for hunting vacations but probably also in an effort to resolve differences. While Qatar doesn't make Tunisia's Top 10 list for foreign direct investment, the stakes for Tunisia are not insignificant. For example, state-owned Qatar Telecom owns a 51 percent share of Kuwait's Wataniya, which in turn holds a 50 percent stake in Tunisiana, Tunisia's private mobile operator. In addition, in May 2007, state-owned Qatar Petroleum signed an MOU with the GOT to invest US \$2 billion in the Skhira oil refinery. End Comment.

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<http://www.state.sgov.gov/p/nea/tunis/index.cfm>
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